

VICTIM SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

2009
ANNUAL REPORT



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

VICTIM SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

Montgomery County, Maryland
2009 Annual Report
Advocating for the Victims of Crime

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Samantha Davis

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Visit Our Website:

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhstmpl.asp?url=/content/hhs/vasap/dvbrd.asp>

Or

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/vasap (Click on Advisory Board)

MISSION STATEMENT

To support Montgomery County's commitment to serving victims of crime, including rape, domestic violence, sexual assault, homicide survivors, adults molested as children, terrorism, hate violence, robbery, driving while intoxicated (DWI) and vehicular manslaughter, assault, battery, burglary, arson, larceny, stalking, carjacking, purse snatching, harassment and vandalism and bullying.

MANDATE

The Board must periodically

- review available services and facilities for victims and their families;
- determine needs of the victim and family services/programs;
- submit at least one report annually to the County Executive and County Council on the progress of programs to victims and their families along with the actions needed to improve those programs;
- make recommendations for appropriate allocation of funds in accordance with agreed upon priorities and consideration of financial resources.

The Board also assists the Director of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in the development of the Annual Victim Services and Families Plan, and acts as a local advocate for victim services programming.

Montgomery County Code -- Art. VII, Section 24-56.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR, SAMANTHA DAVIS

Dear County Executive Leggett:

It is with great enthusiasm that I greet you on behalf of the Victim Services Advisory Board (VSAB). We have worked tirelessly this year to advocate for Montgomery County's victims and their families. A major part of our work this year has been trying to find ways to tackle the issue of bullying in schools and to be a voice for those who are often unheard or ignored. Additionally, we have worked on the issue of insuring that the resources housed in Montgomery County are made available to any student in the public school system who reports that a fellow student has victimized them. With this in mind we have remained vocal in letting the County Council and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) know how important reporting and referral is to our Board and to the well-being of students as reporting mechanisms are improved.

We will continue to make sure that these improvements remain and continue, but as we enter the New Year we do it with many goals on our minds. Chief among these is to make sure that the offices within our county and our county's government maintains their resources to serve the community. It is our belief that the positions that are currently in place should be protected even in these tough economic times because we know that in these times there will continue to be victims who need victim services in this county. Additionally, we will be working to assess each area where victims are helped, so that by this time next year we will be able to give an even more accurate assessment of how those who give and receive services in this county view the resources. We are a committed board that can ably give advice on how our peers in this community be served.

I thank you for this opportunity to share our report and our advice that we hope will impact our community positively.

Sincerely,

Samantha Y. Davis, Chair
Victim Services Advisory Board

MEETINGS AND MEMBERSHIP

MEETINGS

The Board meets the fourth Thursday of each month, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., at the Office of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, 1301 Piccard Drive, Fourth Floor Conference Room, Rockville, Maryland 20850. The Board does not meet in August and combines its November and December sessions into one meeting. All meetings are open to the public.

MEMBERSHIP

Tazeen Ahmad
Saundra Barnhard
Toni Zollicoffer-Brown
Kareem Davis
Marille Herrmann
Parker OShea
Rabbi David Rose (Clergy)
George Sims
Naureen Weissman

Linda Anderson
Kim Barry
Samantha Davis
Rachel Goldfarb
Virginia Baran Lyons
Mathew Quinn
William C. Smith Jr.
Beverly Stern
JudithWhiton

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERSHIP

Ellen Alexander, Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD)
George Simms, State's Attorney's Office (SAO)
Nadja Cabello, Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program (VASAP)
Dudley Warner (DHHS)
Eugene Morris (DHHS)

FORMER MEMBERS 2009

Arleen Anderson
Pascale Leone
Lester Stano (Clergy)
Debbie Kempl
Norman Workman
Ethel Burnett

MAJOR ISSUES

Maryland's Diminution of Credit Program

Maryland's Diminution of Credit program allows for all state inmates to significantly reduce time they serve of their sentence in exchange for positive behavior. Under the program any inmate, including violent offenders can earn up to 20 days off for every 30 days served. Members of the Board expressed concern in the leniency of this program and felt that it allows inmates to shave off too much of their initial sentence. The Board supports the Police Department recommendation to install a truth in sentencing program for violent offenders, which would require violent criminals to serve 85% of a sentence before they are eligible for a parole hearing. The Board would focus on bringing community awareness to the dangers posed by diminution of credits to the populace. Board Vice-Chair, William Smith, wrote several op-ed articles to local newspapers on this topic to increase public awareness of the issue.

Delay in Processing Claims with CICB

The issue of delayed processing and inconsistencies in claims approval and denials with the State's Criminal Injuries Compensation Board (CICB) continues to be of concern for the Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program. Ellen Alexander and Nadja Cabello reported on the lack of response from the CICB to VSAB's letter regarding CICB's poor customer service for Montgomery County victims of crime, particularly those victims with questionable immigration status. There is additional concern that the new requirements for documentation of legal residency will prevent Montgomery County victims of crime from receiving compensation from the State CICB. Furthermore, the lack of Spanish speaking investigators at the CICB provides another disadvantage to many victims. The Board will continue to monitor these issues until there is progress and resolution.

Outreach to Crime Victims in Public Schools

The Victim Services Advisory Board continues its commitment in ensuring that students in Montgomery County Public Schools that are victims of crime and are in need of specialized crime victim counseling receive it in a timely fashion. Though a database was formulated to track the number of crime events that occur in schools, there is no codified method of referral or a way to track referrals to crime victim services. Children who are victimized and go unnoticed or untreated for the emotional issues associated with victimization can have major issues during their adulthood.

Board Chair, Samantha Davis, gave testimony on victim services before the DHHS Subcommittee. A prime subject was outreach to youth victims of bullying and a request that MCPS develop a protocol for dealing with victims and ensuring their referral to County services such as Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program and Abused Persons Program (APP). Board members feel that MCPS database on violent incidents be made available to the public and to County services.

Board reviewed and made recommendations on the MCPS policy on Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation which is currently being considered by the Board of Education.

Fundraising

Throughout the year the Board explored various venues by which funds could be raised for the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund. Tazeen Ahmad was able to secure two donations that totaled \$5000 for the fund. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, whose National Headquarters are in Silver Spring Maryland donated \$2500 to the fund and Humanity First, a non-profit based in Baltimore, Maryland also donated \$2500. It was noted that Montgomery County Government matches donations two to one for the County's Crime Victims' Compensation Fund therefore the fund received a total of \$15,000 to help crime victims in Montgomery County.

The Fundraising committee of the Board will continue to explore ways to raise additional funds for the Fund. The law that governs Montgomery County Government Crime Victims' Compensation Fund states that 10% of monies collected be spent to advertise and hold fundraising events.

BUDGET PRIORITIES FOR 2010

The mission of the Board is to support Montgomery County's commitment to serving victims of crime. In these difficult budgetary times, victim services should not be reduced because they are part of the County government's fundamental responsibilities.

Additionally, growth in the County population, particularly within the immigrant and non-English speaking community, has resulted in a greater need for these services. Providing these services will require additional funds, staff, and resources.

With that, the Board has outlined five areas as budgetary priorities for calendar year 2010:

1. Abused Persons Program

- Transitional housing (and/or increased shelter) for domestic violence victims, particularly undocumented immigrants
- Additional workers to reduce waitlist for offender counseling

2. Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program

- Spanish and French speaking case workers to serve waitlist for torture victims
- A courthouse-based victim advocate

3. Police

- County vehicle to transport victims

4. State's Attorney's Office

- Funds for lost wages, meals and transportation for victims testifying in court and parents of juvenile victims

5. Sheriff's Office

- Ensure that federal grant funding for prosecution/victim services continues to be funded

BUDGET PRIORITIES FOR 2011

Overview:

The Victim Services Advisory Board is continuing in its mission to support Montgomery County's commitment to serving victims of crime. Currently, we are continuing our focus on several areas including:

- Impact of Bullying in Public Schools and Outreach to Crime Victims in Public Schools
- Maryland's Diminution of Credit for State Inmates
- Delay in Processing Claims with CICB
- Adequate Staffing for Victim Services Providers
- Crime Victims' Compensation Fund

As we enter 2010, we are reflecting on the interviews that our members conducted with local victim services organizations, both public and non-profit. Our budget concerns reflect the needs articulated by the interviewees.

Budget Priorities:

During this unprecedented budget shortfall, we, as a Board, are aware that it is a time when more spending is a near impossibility. Our overwhelming recommendation is to first do no harm. We request that positions that assist our victims are not eliminated. There are positions in the police department, sheriff's department, APP and VASAP, that are vacant and we ask that they be filled and that positions that are frozen be exempt from the hiring freeze. During this time of economic crisis, the needs of the victims and the volume of victims have increased, so these resources are needed to maintain the same level of service.

Through our interviews, victim services providers did identify needs that need to be met once the budget crisis is over and we feel that we would be remiss not to mention them. They are as follows:

- Abused Persons Program
 - Transitional housing (and/or increased shelter) for domestic violence, human-trafficking victims, particularly undocumented immigrants
- Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program
 - Spanish and French speaking victim assistant to serve waitlist for torture victims
 - A courthouse-based victim advocate – once the short term American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) grant expired
- Police
 - County vehicle to transport victims
- State's Attorney's Office
 - Funds for lost wages, meals, transportation for victims testifying in court and parents of juvenile victims

SUMMARY OF VSAB INTERVIEWS WITH VICTIM-SERVING PROGRAMS

Background

During the past year, VSAB members conducted interviews with representatives from eight victim services agencies and organizations in Montgomery County. The purpose of the interviews was to gain a clear, in-depth understanding of the range of services available to victims of violence, to identify strengths and areas of need within local programs, and to solicit suggestions for how the Victim Services Advisory Board could help local agencies and organizations sustain and scale-up their programs.

Scope of Interviews

The interview focused on the populations served by each program, types of services offered, programmatic strengths and areas of need, challenges, and ways VSAB can help programs advance their goals. Each interviewee was asked the following questions about his/her program:

- *What does your program do? Whom do you serve?*
- *What funds do you have at your disposal?*
- *How many people do you serve?*
- *What are your program's strengths? What is your program doing well?*
- *What is your program's greatest need?*
- *What do you think needs to change in terms of services or public policy?*
- *If you had a wish list what would be on it? If you had additional funding, what would you do with it?*
- *What are new opportunities or initiatives you are pursuing?*
- *What are challenges your program faces?*
- *How can the Board help you in its capacity as an advisory committee to the Montgomery County Council and Executive?*
- *What are your priorities for victims in the county?*

Strengths

Agencies and organizations serving victims of violence in our county are involved in remarkable and innovative efforts to combat domestic violence, sexual assault, bullying, stalking, child abuse, elder abuse, and other forms of violence. The eight programs explored through VSAB interviews collectively serve tens of thousands of people each year. Some key strengths identified both within programs and within the community include:

- Competent, experienced, and dedicated staff;
- Improved community awareness of abuse and violence;
- County emphasis on systems change, or addressing the “bigger picture” of violence in our community;
- Integration of services at the Family Justice Center;
- Coordination between the county police, the State’s Attorney’s Office, VASAP, and other agencies;

- Breadth of services, e.g., counseling for family members of suicide victims and tutoring for survivors of domestic violence;
- Effective fundraising strategies;
- Responsiveness to victims
- Professionalism among staff members

Needs and Challenges

The majority of the programs are struggling to meet the needs of a higher volume and increasingly diverse population of victims. Furthermore, the increase of Internet crimes has presented new challenges for law enforcement, victim service providers, and prosecutors. Better community awareness of local resources is to be celebrated, but it has also presented a challenge for programs because they must serve a larger number of victims with funding sources that can be flat, declining, or unstable. Interviewees identified the following major program needs:

- Additional personnel and volunteers, such as trilingual therapists (including those fluent in American Sign Language), more prosecutors, staff to fill evening and weekend hours, forensic medical care providers, volunteer advocates, and others;
- Additional and stable funding sources, particularly to address losses due to the economic crisis;
- Better collaboration and coordination across programs serving victims of domestic violence
- Enhanced community outreach and awareness.

Table 1: Areas of Need in Local Victim Services Organizations

Agency / Organization	RESOURCES			ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT		
	Materials and Supplies	Funding / Fundraising	Additional and Specialized Personnel	Policy	Community Outreach	Advocacy to County and State Gov't
Domestic Violence Unit / Montgomery County Sheriff's Office			X		X	
Betty Ann Krahnke Center Shelter	X	X			X	X
Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program	X	X	X	X		X
Victims' Rights Foundation		X			X	
Interfaith Coalition Against Domestic Violence		X				X
State's Attorney's Office		X	X		X	
MCPD Victim Assistance Unit	X		X		X	X
Abused Persons Program		X			X	

How VSAB Can Help

Interviewees described the various ways that VSAB can support them, principally through advising the County Council and Executive. Specific suggestions include:

- Support requests for additional funding, for everything from reimbursement for expenses incurred to program expansion;

- Promote—in the community and to county government—program expansion and long-range goals, such as more outreach in schools, a Guiding Light program in local places of worship, more aggressive investigations of elder abuse, and others;
- Emphasize the need for resources to meet agencies' mandates—programs need funding to do what they are required by law to do; and
- Advocate for more coordinated and effective policies, such as more stringent consequences for offenders and policies that support a victim-friendly environment. It was noted that some regulations create complications for families being served by the new Family Justice Center.

Acknowledgments

VSAB is grateful to the representatives of these organizations for offering their time in participating in interviews. Interviewees' ideas and input are valuable to VSAB as the Board identifies its priorities for 2010 and beyond.

- Hannah Sassoon - Domestic Violence Unit / Montgomery County Sheriff's Office
- Felicia I. Kolodner, Clinical Director; and Kareem Davis - Betty Ann Krahne Center Shelter
- Nadja Cabello, Director - Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program
- Victims' Rights Foundation
- Interfaith Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- George Simms - State's Attorney's Office
- Ellen Alexander - MCPD Victim Assistance Unit
- Eugene Morris - Abused Persons Program

ATTENDANCE AT EXTERNAL MEETINGS & TRAININGS

February

County Executive meeting with Boards and Commissions

March

Meeting with HHS Director on FY 2010 County Budget Presentation

May

Board tour of the newly opened Family Justice Center

July

Council DHHS Committee Hearing with Boards and Commissions

DHHS Subcommittee Hearing on Victim Services in DHHS

October

Meeting of Criminal Justice Coordinating Commission (CJCC)

November

Meeting with HHS Director

GUEST SPEAKERS

Throughout the year, various victim services experts made insightful educational presentations to the Board. Of special note, as it pertained to our outreach project was the presentation done by Capt. Patty Walker of Major Crimes Division, MCPD, reported on the need for Diminution Credit (DC) Reform. Currently DC allows for the deduction of confinement for good behavior; each credit means one day less confinement and 20 credits are currently allowed per month. The Police Department is concerned that it will lead to the early release of violent criminals and urged board to focus on community awareness of the dangers posed by diminution credits to the populace

Bethany Holliday, victim assistant from the Sheriff's Office reported on her position as a victim advocate and gave a brief overview of the new Family Justice Center, a one-stop shop for victims of domestic violence.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Nadja Cabello and Deborah Howard are the staff support for the Board.